

IMPORTANT LITERARY WORKS WITH WHICH AP U.S. HISTORY STUDENTS SHOULD BECOME FAMILIAR

LETTERS FROM AN AMERICAN FARMER (1770)-JEAN DE CREVECOEUR

In his writing, de Crevecoeur noted that an American phenomenon of fusing ideas, ethnic backgrounds, and Old World cultural characteristics was becoming a legitimate possibility. He was particularly romantic, optimistic, and upbeat about the chances of America's standing for something unique as a futuristic society.

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA (1840)-ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

De Tocqueville romanticized the speed, conflict, and the need for immediate physical gratification of the American citizen. He saw Americans as obsessed to create, build, and succeed. To critics who would argue that America was chaotic, de Tocqueville responded that any truly democratic state is always in some conflict. He felt that creativity emerged from conflict. And he felt that democracy came to the U.S. from Europe, that it was nurtured in the eastern colonies and states, and that it was later spread to the west by those who settled there. He believed that American individualism arose due to the absence of an aristocracy. No novelty in the U.S. struck me more vividly during my stay there than the equality of conditions. He believed that American equality, the fluidity of the social order, derived from Americans' mobility. Restlessness and movement, geographic and social mobility offered people a way to start anew regardless of where they came from or who they were.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN (1850)-HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

This is an overly simplistic but effective novel that revealed the plight of the American black in coping with the slave system. According to her book, plantation owners/overseers were all maniacal tyrants like Simon Legree, and all slaves were exploited for economic and sexual reasons, both charges having merit. This book served to unify public opinion in the northern and western areas of the country. Abolitionist newspaper editors could quote freely from her writings on slavery, and often passed her information off as documented fact. In her childhood she had been very fond of her parents' free black servants, particularly one very kind woman who may have been a model for characters in this book. Stowe, unlike her father, a minister, never visited the south. Abraham Lincoln credited her with being the little lady who started the Civil War.

A CENTURY OF DISHONOR (1881)-HELEN HUNT JACKSON

Jackson was a writer and advocate for Indian rights. This work was one of the first to advocate more humane policies toward Native Americans. She became interested in Indians after moving to Colorado with her second husband. Although Jackson did a good deal of research for this work, she really understood little about Indian culture. Her subsequent novel about California Indians, **RAMONA**, was a greater popular success. Quote from her book: This Congress could cover itself with the luster of glory as the first to cut short our nation's record of cruelties and perjuries - the first to attempt to redeem the U.S. from the shame of a century of dishonor!

LOOKING BACKWARD 2000-1887 (1888)-EDWARD BELLAMY

This work inspired millions of readers in the late 19th century. Bellamy offered hope that the vicious cycle of unending competition among individuals would somehow be replaced by a more cooperative society. In the book the hero falls into a hypnotic sleep and awakens in the year 2000. He looks backward and finds that the social and economic injustices of 1887 have melted away under an idyllic government that has nationalized big business and eliminated cutthroat competition. Bellamy, a Utopian socialist, looked forward to the day when America would be a socialistic society.

THE INFLUENCE OF SEA POWER UPON HISTORY 1660-1783 (1890) -CAPTAIN ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

Mahan is credited with popularizing the idea that sea power lies behind every great nation. He influenced Theodore Roosevelt and other imperialists during the latter years of the 19th century as nations raced to acquire colonies and needed coaling stations throughout the world to maintain their navies.

HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES (1890)-JACOB RIIS

Addressing the squalor, congestion, and confusion of tenement life in New York City, Riis, a writer, social reformer, and friend of Theodore Roosevelt dissected the immigrant composition of various ghettos. He cited the racial and cultural characteristics of the Chinese, Jewish, Italian, and Greek populations (new immigrants) and saw the common denominator of poverty and suffering as their lot in urban America. Riis, himself a Danish immigrant, was also a photographer, and many of the photos we have of turn of the century immigrant life come from his collection.

LIFE AND TIMES OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS (1892)-FREDERICK DOUGLASS

In his book written in 1881 and enlarged in 1892, Douglass, a native of Maryland and a former slave, dealt with the psychological aspects of prejudice and racism. He wrote about the demoralizing aspects of being a black husband, father, and worker. He did not limit his scope to the Southern plantation system, but demonstrated that the ship building industry in New Bedford, Massachusetts, contained as much latent racial hostility as a South Carolina plantation. He saw abolitionism as preached by William Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Weld and politicized by Charles Sumner as a way of breaking down this dehumanizing process.

MAGGIE, GIRL OF THE STREETS (1893)- STEPHEN CRANE

In this work Crane wrote of the struggles of ordinary people to survive in the streets of N.Y. of the 1890 s. Maggie is a pretty slum girl who grows up somehow escaping the psychological defeat of the tenements, only to fall victim later to her own loneliness, poverty, and misguided trust. In another work called **GEORGE S MOTHER**, George s mother, a frail, elderly woman, devotes herself to caring for her adult son, the only survivor of her 5 children. This book captures the language and flavor of the section of New York City known as The Bowery.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FRONTIER IN AMERICAN HISTORY (1893)-

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

Turner wrote his doctoral dissertation after finding out that the census data of 1890 revealed the closing of the frontier. He revolutionized the writing of history by reversing the emphasis on the European origins of American institutions. To him the frontier experience shaped America's institutions more than our ancient political and constitutional principles.

THE OCTOPUS (1901)-FRANK NORRIS

This muckraking novel was an account of the struggle between the California wheat growers and the railroads. In the novel Norris compared the stranglehold the railroads had on the farmers to the way an octopus killed its victims. The selection below gives one a sense of the power of the railroads.

For a moment Dyke was confused. Then swiftly the matter became clear in his mind. The Railroad had raised the rate on hops from two cents to five.

All his calculations as to a profit on his little investment he had based on a freight rate of two cents a pound. He was under contract to deliver his crop. He could not draw back. The new rate ate up every cent of his gains. He stood there ruined.

Why, what do you mean? he burst out. You promised me a rate of two cents and I went ahead with my business with that understanding. . .

The rate is five cents, declared the clerk doggedly.

Well that ruins me, shouted Dyke. Do you understand? I won't make fifty cents. Make? Why, I will owe, - I'll be-be- That ruins me, do you understand?

The other raised a shoulder.

We don't force you to ship. You can do as you like. The rate is five cents.

Well-but-. . . . You told me-you promised me a two-cent rate.

. . . Dyke stared in blank astonishment. . . .

. . . Look here. What's your basis of applying freight rates, anyhow? he suddenly vociferated with furious sarcasm. . . .

S. Behrman emphasized each word of his reply with a tap of one forefinger on the counter before him:

All-the traffic-will-bear.

It is interesting to note that Theodore Roosevelt took issue with a lot of what Norris wrote. Below is an excerpt from a letter written to his friend Owen Wister after Roosevelt had read *The Octopus*.

He has a good idea and he has some power but he left me with the impression that his overstatement was so utterly preposterous as to deprive his work of all value. A good part of it reads like the ravings which Altgeld and Bryan regard as denunciation of wrong. . . More and more I have grown to have a horror of the reformer who is half charlatan and half fanatic, and ruins his own cause by overstatement. If Norris's book is taken to apply to all the west, as it certainly would be taken by an ordinary man who reads it, then it stands on an exact level with some of the publications of the W.C.T.U. (Women's Christian Temperance Union) in which the Spanish War, our troubles in the Philippines, and civic dishonesty and social disorder, are all held to spring from the fact that sherry is drunk at the White House.

THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK (1903)-W.E.B. DUBOIS

In this work, DuBois, a scholarly, eastern, Harvard educated, no-nonsense African American pointed out that The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line. In this work he described the magnitude of American racism and he demanded an end to it. He drew on his own life for illustration, from his early experiences teaching in Tennessee to the death of his infant son and his historic break with the accommodationist position of Booker T. Washington. DuBois embraced an anti-capitalist approach and cited the need for direct action by blacks to challenge the monied white establishment. The great villains in America, according to him, were the bankers, merchants, landlords, and contractors who continually squeezed the African American out of competition. His solution was developed through the advent of political organization, the Niagara Convention movement, and the eventual founding of the NAACP. Unlike Booker T. Washington, DuBois wanted blacks to work for social and political equality at the same time as they were striving for economic equality. He wanted immediate black equality in all areas.

THE JUNGLE (1906)-UPTON SINCLAIR

Upton Sinclair was a socialist writer who attacked the meat packing industry in this book, the most powerful and widely read muckraking novel of the day. Sinclair exposed the abominable conditions in the Chicago stockyards and meat packing plants with stomach turn descriptions:

There were cattle which had been fed on whiskey-malt, the refuse of the breweries, and had become what the men called steerly -which means covered with boils. It was a nasty job killing these, for when you plunged your knife into them they would burst and splash foul-smelling stuff into your face; and when a man's sleeves were smeared with blood, and his hands steeped in it, how was he ever to wipe his face, or to clear his eyes

to that he could see? It was stuff such as this that made the embalmed beef that had killed several times as many United States soldiers as all the bullets of the Spaniards.

This novel exerted a powerful influence on Congress to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act of 1906.

AN ECONOMIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CONSTITUTION (1913)-CHARLES A. BEARD

Beard, an historian, argued that economic interests and motives led the Founding Fathers, a group of merchants and business oriented lawyers, to create a Constitution to protect and to promote their own economic interests and to defend private property. However, he contends that if it had served special interests in one age, it could certainly be changed to serve broader interests in another. Beard's book was published during the Progressive Era, a time when the rights of individual Americans were being championed at the expense of the rights of big businessmen.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH (1939)-JOHN STEINBECK

Flight, fear, and shanty towns were the lot of migrant farmers as they trekked through the dust bowl of the southwest (Oklahoma) into Hoovervilles in California in futile attempts to find work or cultivatable land. Steinbeck delineated the loss of dignity for families and individuals as they were oppressed by weather-related and economic conditions. (Steinbeck was a writer for the Federal Writers Project of the W.P.A.)

NATIVE SON (1940)-RICHARD WRIGHT

Wright described with stark, tragic realism the frustrations of a young black living in the slums of a great American city. In 1945 **BLACK BOY**, a record of Wright's childhood and youth in Mississippi was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Although there was some disagreement about the accuracy of the work as an autobiography, there was no dispute about the power of this work as a story of life among poor, underprivileged, Southern Blacks. The following is a selection from **AMERICAN HUNGER** published in 1944.

... Hated by whites and being an organic part of the culture that hated him, the black man grew in turn to hate in himself that which others hated in him. But pride would make him hide his self-hate, for he would not want whites to know that he was so thoroughly conquered by them that his total life was conditioned by their attitude; but in the act of hiding his self-hate, he could not help but hate those who evoked his self-hate in him. . . Held at bay by the hate of others, preoccupied with his own feelings, he was continuously at war with reality. He became inefficient, less able to see and judge the objective world. And when he reached that state, the white people looked at him and laughed and said: Look, didn't I tell you niggers were that way? (Richard Wright was a writer for the Federal Writers Project of the W.P.A.)

AN AMERICAN DILEMMA (1944)-GUNNAR MYRDAL

The most ambitious study of the place of African Americans in American life was undertaken by Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish scholar at the University of Stockholm. Together with a large staff of

sociologists, historians, economists, psychologists, and political scientists a number of major works were published, the most important of which was **AN AMERICAN DILEMMA**. This book dealt with the status of blacks in U.S. society. The dilemma which Myrdal pointed out was the gap between American ideals and American racial practices. The treatment of Blacks was America's greatest scandal and the almost universal rejection of them was America's outstanding denial of its own profession of faith in the equality of mankind. This book helped the push for desegregating the armed forces and public schools in this country.

BABY AND CHILD CARE (1946)-DR. BENJAMIN SPOCK

This book urged mothers (but not fathers because he assigned them little formal role in child rearing) always to think of their children first. He urged mothers to be constantly available to feed and communicate with their babies and to remember that feeding is learning. Although no mother could be all things to her baby, women who embraced Dr. Spock's teachings tended to believe they had failed if they were not. Guilt was the inevitable result of the effort to be not only mother, but teacher, psychologist, and buddy.

THE LONELY CROWD (1950)-DAVID RIESMAN

David Riesman, a sociologist, wrote about the different ways in which social conformity occurred. He noted what seemed to be the difference between inner-directed people and other-directed people. Inner-directed people received their goals and their ideas of right and wrong behavior from their parents. These goals and values were drilled into the inner-directed person so thoroughly that they became a sort of internal compass which kept that person on course throughout life. Other-directed people received their goals and ideas of proper conduct from a much wider source—from parents, school, friends, the mass media, and so on. The other-directed person continued throughout life to respond to the actions and wishes of others, and to take behavioral clues and set goals in accordance with the ever-changing social context. Riesman suggested that Americans were moving from an inner-directed toward an outer-directed orientation. He criticized the decentralization of leisure in the suburbs that he saw occurring. The home itself, rather than the neighborhood, was becoming the chief gathering place for the family—either in the family room with its games, t.v., and informality, or outdoors around the barbecue.

INVISIBLE MAN (1952)-RALPH ELLISON

This book gave white Americans a glimpse of the psychic costs to black Americans of exclusion from the white American dream. I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me. (Ralph Ellison was a writer for the Federal Writers Project of the W.P.A.)

THE MAN IN THE GREY FLANNEL SUIT (1955)-SLOAN WILSON

This fictional work told the story of how the corporate culture took over the lives of individuals, helping them to lose their identities as the group became more important than the individual. The main character led a treadmill existence commuting to his white collar job in the city. The theme of mass conformity again emerged in this book, a theme which some people saw as being characteristic of the 1950 s.

ON THE ROAD (1957)-JACK KEROUAC

In this novel Kerouac contrasted the warmth and simplicity that he saw in lower class life with the coldness and control that he felt middle class values had imposed on him. His was a romantic view of lower class life, ignoring the day to day hardships of that existence, the violence and despair that poverty can breed. But it was a view shared by many of his college age readers. Kerouac was part of a bohemian literary movement that he called the beat generation. Beat had a number of meanings. It was beat as in beat up or funky, beat as in beat down by society, beat as in beatific or blessed; and it was also the beat or rhythm of jazz. To the beats middle class morality and materialism were soul destroying. In order to achieve individual freedom, they believed, it was necessary to drop out of conventional society and tune in to one's true nature by giving expression to basic instincts, energies, and emotions. Drugs and free love were considered acceptable parts of that process, work, except for creative work, was not. It was only necessary for survival. The beats' spiritual descendants were the hippies of the 1960 s. Poets of the beat generation, such as Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Rexroth, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti- expressed the same views as Kerouac. Although beats professed to be anti-intellectual, beat writing found its widest audience among college students who thought of themselves as intellectuals. Those who tuned into beat life adopted long hair, dark scruffy clothes, slang expressions drawn from the street and from jazz, and the habit of gathering in coffee houses to listen to music (often the folk variety) and poetry. They became known as beatniks .

THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY (1958)-JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

Galbraith, a noted economist, said that since WW II, capitalism has worked quite brilliantly. He said that economic growth would bring prosperity to everyone. Some would have more than others, but in time everybody would have enough. Production has eliminated the more acute tensions associated with economic inequality. Not until chapter 23 did he mention poverty, and when he did he dismissed it as not a universal or massive affliction , but more nearly as an afterthought. Galbraith added a phrase to our economic thinking - conspicuous consumption. In this book he castigated economists for continuing to emphasize production for personal consumption in a society that neglected public communal needs.

THE OTHER AMERICA (1962)-MICHAEL HARRINGTON

Some say that this book was responsible for Kennedy's interest in the poor and LBJ's Great Society and War on Poverty. It showed that 20-25% of American families were living below the governmentally defined poverty line. This poverty was created by increasing numbers of young and old, job displacement produced by advanced technology, and regions (like Appalachia) which had been bypassed by economic development.

SILENT SPRING (1962)-RACHEL CARSON

This book alerted the nation to the disastrous effects of pesticides and insecticides on the balance of nature. DDT was especially singled out. This book may have heralded the beginning of the environmental consciousness movement.

THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE (1963)-BETTY FRIEDAN

Ms. Friedan said that women across the country were deeply troubled by the problem that has no name. She said that most women believed that all they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children. The problem was that this mystique of feminine fulfillment left many wives and mothers feeling empty or incomplete. Such feelings were at odds with the images conveyed by the t.v. advertisers, magazine writers, beauticians, and psychiatrists who had conspired to create the image of a woman, gaily content in a world of bedroom, kitchen, sex, babies, and home. Until this time society had considered any woman who was dissatisfied with such surroundings to be neurotic. But as Friedan pointed out, the woman who spent her life in a world of children sacrificed her adult frame of reference and sometimes her very own identity.